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ABSTRACT

Noting that the terms used by the Western media in describing the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran by the Ayatollah Khomeini have created the impression that the Ayatollah is both irrational and inhumane, this paper argues from contemporary eclectic rhetorical theory--that "rationality" is a function of perspective--to demonstrate that the Ayatollah is acting rationally within his world view. In addition, it argues that if social critics are to understand and explain events in Iran in an eclectic spirit, there must be some fundamental understanding of Islam--as well as an understanding that the word "republic" means something quite different in Iran than it does in the West. Using excerpts from the Koran and the Ayatollah's speeches, the paper shows the correspondence between the ancient view of the Islamic republic and the manner in which the Ayatollah has attempted to create a new legal and social order. (Author/FL)

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Khomeini's Argument for His Islamic Republic:

A Relationist Perspective

> Teheran is a thousand miles from the open sea, more than six thousand miles from Washington, and in another dimension in time. There is more in this than merely an observation that Ayatollah Khomeini seems a medieval figure. Certainly there is something in him that suggests Peter the Hermit preaching the first Crusade...Such men cannot be called evil. They are men with their own values, for whom the most important things do not exist in compromised time. They believe that common life is ephemeral, that justice lies in eternity. Temporal happiness is illusion or temptation. Compromise is betrayal. Truth is more important than feeling.
>
> --The New Yorker, 12/10/79

The February 1979 Islamic Revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini has sent shockwaves felt halfway around the world. One year after Khomeini's takeover, most Western nations have felt oil supplies tighten drastically. Libya and the Palestine Liberation Organization have strengthened their ranks and are now imposing more power in the Arab states as well as in the rest of the world. Most recently, the deposed Shah, in endangered exile, has created a major

world crisis by refusing to return to Iran and face charges of treason and corruption. The United States, caught in the throngs of the Khomeini-Shah dispute, has seen fifty victims held hostage in retaliation for its decision to allow the Shah to receive American medical treatment. News media from around the world continually stand by, nervously awaiting the next Khomeini directive.

The U.S. embassy takeover has been the Ayatollah's most powerful indictment against the Western world to date. And in response to this as well as his subsequent actions, many Americans have accused him of being crazed, senile and an Iranian equivalent to Jim Jones.[1] The purpose of this paper is to provide a different focus on the Iranian crisis; namely, to argue Khomeini's position from a relationist perspective. For this analysis, I have included Stephen Toulmin's model of argument as well as his emphasis on field dependent variables. In doing so, I submit that Khomeini's claims for "justice" through "international law" are as legitimate as Carter's support for the Shah's "human rights." The inherent differences are not in logic; rather they lie in culture, religion and world power.

The Nature of Argument

Before discussing the Toulmin model and its application to Khomeini's Iran, I would like to define more clearly my assumptions about the nature of argument in this context. Many scholars have entered into the controversy of argument

as process versus argument as product.[2] The former assumes an opportunity for interaction, "not a kind of reasoning so much as a kind of relationship into which people enter."[3] The latter, argument as product, is the linguistic act of advancing claims and reasons for a particular belief or philosophical stance. In most cases, the two notions are interdependent. As Brockriede states:

> Although persons can make arguments without engaging in the process of arguing, I do not see how they can argue without making arguments. Characteristically, the act of advancing arguments precedes or initiates the process of arguing.[4]

In a situation such as international diplomacy, however, occasions for the social interaction described above are rare, if present at all. For example, the Ayatollah has committed acts of retaliation against what he terms, "the power of the Great Satan."[5] In doing so, he has stated his justifications for the demonstrations, executions and U.S. embassy takeover. He has hardly entered into the process of arguing, for that would imply a willingness to communicate. Instead, he has advanced his claims and intends to see them fulfilled without compromise.

With this in mind, it seems most appropriate to study Khomeini from the Toulmin model of argument. While Toulmin acknowledges arguing as a process, his major emphasis lies in the structure of the linguistic message. In addition, Toulmin stresses the importance of recognizing field dependence as well

as the substantive context of argument. Burleson defines the concept of substantive context as:

> ...the meaning structure, universe of discourse, or language game in which arguments arise. This context is a locus of ideas and relationships among ideas shared among members of a community. A consideration of this context dictates concern with issues such as: What constitute believable and relevant data and backing? What kinds of claims legitimately can be put forth? What factors determine the extent to which claims must be qualified? What types of warrants are permissable?[6]

Clearly, Khomeini's rhetoric reminds us of the importance in looking at the context of an event. From the Western perspective, Iranians are acting as terrorists who threaten the very essence of law and order. Their claims of treason against the Shah are unfair and their behavior toward the U.S. embassy violates all legitimate means of authority. On the other hand, I argue that the Muslims <u>are</u> following a legitimate means of authority; the non-Western Shiite sect, under the leadership of Khomeini. Also, they are reacting to centuries of injustice by men who ruled for profit and self-aggrandisement. These aspects cannot be ignored, and, according to Toulmin's model, can be considered equally valid. The difference lies in cultural and religious perspective.

<u>Toulmin's Model of Argument</u>

The seizure of the U.S. embassy by the Ayatollah and his followers can be summarized in the following way:

DATA	QUALIFIER	CLAIM
The Shah and his predecessors, with the help of the U.S., have robbed, tortured and abused Iranian citizens	No compromise	The Shah should be brought back to Iran for trial

WARRANT
The U.S. is continuing its violations by granting asylum to the Shah

BACKING
Islam demands justice for those who have abused their power against the people

To further explicate their argument, i.e., that the United States is and has been in violation of international law by granting the Shah asylum, I will explore the data, warrant, backing, qualifier and claim more closely.

Data: The History of the Shah in Iran/U.S. Intervention

Historians have characterized Iran as a nation in constant flux; outside invasions, unpredictable farming and irrigation conditions and governmental ineptitude have brought uncertainty to the once prominent Mediterranean land. Present-day frontiers are a result of countless border disputes and

and foreign occupation. In fact, the only constants in this everchanging country seem to be culture, religion and social hierarchy.

Throughout the ages, Iranians have stubbornly held onto a unique cultural heritage in the face of this challenge of foreign intervention. They have maintained the image of sedentary farmers, agriculture taking top priority in their lives. As such, outsiders have come and gone, but the law of the land has remained supreme...at least until recently. The discovery of much needed oil reserves gave Iran renewed prominence in the world. Western nations, anxious to obtain critical supplies for their peoples, attended to the Shah, promising economic stability, technological development and international respect in exchange for oil. Added to the Shah's personal influence in the matter, the age of the "global village" made it virtually impossible for Iranians to sell their oil without Westernizing themselves. As a result, "cultural" invaders in today's world succeeded where tho e in pre-industrial ages could not.

Khomeini's rise against the Shah's regime was neither impetuous nor simple. For nearly two decades, the Ayatollah sermonized from cell blocks and exile quarters in Paris, denouncing governmental murder, corruption and torture--all for the Shah's private gain. The Shah and his family were robbing Iranians blind, and each mounting bank account signified further acquiescence to Western beliefs, attitudes and values. Khomeini argued for a return to Islamic Law and the sedentary culture Iranians had known for many ages.

His following grew steadily; and when political bribery and decay had reached unconscionable heights in 1978, Khomeini's "army" was ready to take over. Surprisingly, the revolution was relatively nonviolent.[7]

The post-revolutionary purge of the Shah's henchmen by political trial and subsequent execution was heartily endorsed by the Iranian masses. They had experienced oppression for many years; few were left untouched by the persecution and graft of the unholy Shah and his generals. They wanted "justice"--and the immediate execution of those who had made them suffer most was applauded. However, the Shah remains unscathed by his crimes in the minds of most Iranians, and, as Khomeini recently stated:

> Our nation is confronted today with the power of a Great Satan, who ruled our Moslem nations and nations of the East for 300 years and with whose encouragement during the past 50 years, that father and son, Reza Khan and Mohammed Reza (the deposed Shah), committed atrocities on this nation. Their atrocities gained momentum lately, and this happened with support from the superpowers, especially the United States.[8]

Warrant: The United States' Violation of International Law

The concepts of international law and human rights have been emphasized in the past several years, especially concerning the plight of political dissidents in the Soviet Union. However, the Iranian crisis has precipitated a new dimension to these rather obscure scales of justice. For example, when does the act of granting diplomatic asylum turn into harboring a political criminal? When is a public

figure considered a "person"; when is he/she a "servant to the people"? And when does international law take precedence over national law? The United States and Iran place markedly different interpretations on these questions and accordingly, have accused each other of violating codes of international justice. President Carter, of course, insists that the Shah was dangerously ill and required American medical care--his major concern was humanitarian in nature. The Ayatollah, on the other hand, demands that the Shah be returned to Iran to face the justice due him--as any "enemy to the people." To Khomeini, humanitarianism should be the las consideration given to a man who has plundered Iran's wealth and tortured its citizens. In granting him asylum, the United States is aiding and abetting a devil:

> A criminal who has burned the houses of this land for 50 years, sent people to prison, carried out many massacres, painted with the blood of our youth the cobblestones and asphalt of out streets, taken our treasures, stolen them and carried them--(the Americans) have taken him and given him refuge. Such a criminal, who ought to have been tried where he committed the crime according to international law, they have taken him away and kept him at a childish impulse.[9]

Khomeini's terroristic response to Carter, his taking of American hostages, seems to be the only way he feels he can gain attention for the Islamic cause. Clearly, a powerful nation like the United States would not have to resort to such tactics, for our diplomatic ties and military and political stability would pre-empt such necessity.

For example, had Nixon run to Mexico after the Watergate scandal, he would have been returned immediately for trial without incident. Third World nations are not given to the luxury of unquestioned power and strength; they must "prove themselves" continuously. Also, in the case of Iran, the Shiite sect of Islam demands action after its leaders have determined good and evil. The jihad, or call to a holy war, is common among Muslims, and will be discussed more fully in the next section.

Backing: Islamic Ideology

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in Ideals and Realities of Islam states that:

> Every revealed religion is the religion and a religion, the religion in as much as it contains within itself the Truth and means of attaining the Truth, a religion since it emphasizes a particular aspect of the Truth in conformity with the spiritual and psychological needs of the humanity for whom it is destined and to whome it is addressed.[10]

The Shiite sect of Islam amply fits Nasr's description; it has provided Iranians with a constancy and heritage to combat the influence of outsiders. Ninety-five percent of Iran's 36 million people are active Muslims--and most of these are Shiites.[11] Clearly, religion plays an important role in the culture and politics of that country.

In basic beliefs and practices, Shiites differ little from Sunnis, the more numerous sect of Islam. Both groups follow the tenets of the Sharī'ah (Divine Law) which guides

an individual's life as well as his/her relationship to the Muslim community as a whole. Both groups adhere to commands of praying five times a day to Allah, fasting, paying alms and making at least one pilgrimage to Mecca.[12] Politically, both groups consider God to be the only legislator; and believe that a political leader functions only to execute laws, not to initiate them.[13] However, Shiites differ from Sunnis in their distrust of any authority that does not emanate from the Imam. Nasr further explains the role of the Imam:

> ...as used specifically in Shi'ism, the Imam means that person who is the realy ruler of the community and especially the inheritor of the esoteric teachings of the prophet. He is one who carries the "Muhammadan Light" within himself, and who fulfills the function of wilāyah (head authority)...It is this Light that continues from cycle of prophecy to another and it is this Light that exists within the Imam, by virtue of whose presence he becomes the Imam...The Imam is, in fact, the sustainer and interpreter par excellence of the revelation. His duty is essentially threefold: to rule over the community of Muslims as the representative of the Prophet, to interpret the religious sciences and the Law to men, especially in their inner meaning, and to guide men in the spiritual life. All of these functions the Imam is able to perform because of the presence of the "Light" within him. As a result of the presence of the Light the Imam also possesses the quality of inerrancy, in spiritual and religious matters.[14]

Ayatollah Khomeini, assuming the position of Imam (or High Teacher) is similar to Pope John Paul II in his perceived eminence and infallibility. However, unlike the Pope, Khomeini traverses both religious and political

boundaries. When he calls upon "all Islamic nations (to) join us in the fight which is between ourselves and America, between Islam and blaspheny,"[15] he uses Allah as supreme authority in all matters. Anyone or anything in opposition to Allah is considered sacrilegious; and unlike most Western Christians, who believe in the separation of church and state, Shiites equate religious blasphemy with political anathema.[16] Their response is to attack the source of evil, and are willing to die for the greater victory of Islam.

Qualifier: No Compromise

In response to releasing the hostages, Khomeini has said:

> It's a question of life and death. The destiny of all Moslem is involved and all Moslems must participate so that the movement does not slow down or come to an end, so that all of the East does not come to an end.[17]

As discussed earlier, Shiites draw a dichotomy between black and white, between good and evil. With this philosophy, there can be no room for compromise. Added to the Islamic fervor, Iranians value the concept of aberu--saving face.[18] In taking the hostages, Khomeini and followers have made a commitment which must be pursued to the end, however bitter that might be. Even if it involves martyrdom, the Shiites are prepared to carry out their threat of prosecuting the hostages as spies. To do otherwise would mean

an acknowledgment of weakness--a pronouncement worse than death.

Finally, the Ayatollah can declare a "no compromise" position because as a third world power, he has nothing to lose. The Iranian economy declines each day, and frustration over rising unemployment, inflation and feuding ayatollahs continues to mount. In pinpointing an international enemy, the United States imperialist powers, Khomeini projects Iranian unrest onto and outside "devil". Further, if the threat of American intervention ever became a reality, i.e., the U.S. takeover of Teheran, Khomeini would be relieved of domestic responsibility for social ills. Thus, in losing the immediate battle over the Shah, Iranians may have won the ultimate war of survival. Admittedly, American takeover is not a preferred goal; however, it may not be a bad alternative compared to the possibility of economic collapse, starvation and civil war.

Claim: Justice for the Shah

In any case, Khomeini continues to accuse the United States of harboring a criminal, demanding that the Shah be brought back to face charges of torture and corruption. From a Western perspective, the Ayatollah seems crazed, inhumane and irrational for his behavior. However, in light of the Islamic ideology as well as Iranian culture and history, Khomeini's argument is

legitimate.

Whatever the future holds for Iranian and U.S. diplomatic relations, Ayatollah Khomeini and his Islamic Republic should be regarded as a warning signal for possible crises in the future. If we, as Americans, continue our egocentric disregard for other value systems, we will find ourselves helpless in the face of a growing Third World. No longer can we claim invulnerability--as a nation of oil "junkies", we have come to depend on those countries who can provide us with our daily "fix". As our needs increase, so must our understanding of social and cultural differences in Third World countries. We cannot continue to dismiss large numbers of people as ignorant, crazed extremists. Instead, we should try to understand their motives and rationales. Third World nations such as Iran have been forced to look at Western countries in the past; Americans will have to look to non-Western countries for our future.

ENDNOTES

[1]Zygmunt Nagorski, "Is Ayatollah Khomeini an Iranian Jim Jones?," The Wall Street Journal (December 4, 1979), p. 20.

[2]Probably the most notable debate over this topic came from the following people: Wayne Brockriede, "Characteristics of Arguments and Arguing," Journal of the American Forensic Association (1977), pp. 129-132; and Daniel J. O'Keefe, "Two Concepts of Argument," Journal of the American Forensic Association (1977), pp. 121-128. Other, more recent articles in this area include: Charles Arthur Willard, "Propositional Argument is to Argument What Talking about Passion is to Passion," Journal of the American Forensic Association (1979), pp. 21-28 and "A Reformulation of the Concept of Argument: The Constructivist/Interactionist Foundations of a Sociology of Argument," Journal of the American Forensic Association (1978), pp. 121-128; Charles W. Kneupper, "On Argument and Diagrams," Journal of the American Forensic Association (1978), pp. 181-182 and "Paradigms and Problems: Alternative Constructivist/Interactionist Implications for Argumentation Theory," Journal of the American Forensic Association (1979), pp. 220-227; and Brant R. Burleson, "On the Analysis and Criticism of Arguments: Some Theoretical and Methodological Considerations," Journal of the American Forensic Association (1979), pp. 137-147.

[3]Willard, "Reformulation of Concept of Argument," p. 125.

[4]Brockriede, "Characteristics of Arguments and Arguing," pp. 129-130.

[5]"Khomeini: 'Expel this Germ," Boston Globe (November 25, 1979), p. 31.

[6]Burleson, "Analysis and Criticism of Arguments," p. 146.

[7]Unlike most revolutions which begin violently and end their bloodshed after victory, the February Revolution began nonviolently and escalated after the Ayatollah's takeover.

[8]"Khomeini: 'Expel this Germ," p. 31.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), p. 15.

[11]Angus Deming and Chris J. Harper, "Iran's Martyr Complex," Newsweek (November 26, 1979), p. 40.

[12]Kenneth L. Woodward and Rachel Mark, "The Roots of Islam," Newsweek (December 3, 1979), pp. 62-63.

[13]Nasr, pp. 93-106.

[14]Ibid., pp. 162-163.

[15]"Khomeini: 'Expel this Germ," p. 31.

[16]Nasr further delineates the differences between Christians and Muslims in politics on pp. 94-95: "The Christian view concerning law which governs man socially and politically is indicated in the well-known saying of Christ, 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's...' With regard to the Divine Law, however, the situation of Islam and Christianity differ completely. Islam never gave unto Caesar what was Caesar's. Rather, it tried to integrate the domain of Caesar itself, namely political, social and economic life, into an encompassing religious world view. Law is therefore in Islam an integral aspect of the revelation and not an alien element."

[17]"Khomeini: 'Expel this Germ," p. 31.

[18]Deming and Harper, "Iran's Martyr Complex," p. 40.